

Public Hearing Testimony
Higher Education and Employment Committee
Madelynn von Baeyer –UCONN Graduate Assistant and Member of UAW GEU Local 6950
SB864 AArequiring the Study of the Use of Medicaid to Cover the Cost of Health Insurance for College Students

Good afternoon Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Committee. My name is Madelynn von Baeyer. I am a graduate assistant at the University of Connecticut (UCONN) in the Anthropology department and a member of UAW Graduate Employee Union Local 6950.

On behalf of 2,200 UCONN graduate teaching and research assistants I am here to oppose SB 864 AA Requiring a Study of the Use of Medicaid to cover the cost of health insurance for college students.

As a graduate assistant, I am a student but also an employee. I teach three discussion sections per week and spend 15 hours per week helping undergraduate students with their studies, grading their exams and providing them academic assistance. In addition to my workload as a GA, I am working on my graduate degree to advance my academic career. The annual salary of a UCONN GA is \$18,000, many of us have families and live off campus and are taxpaying members of our communities.

SB864 seeks to study the effectiveness of prohibiting a student from opting out of UCONN's health insurance plan for purposes of qualifying for Medicaid. UCONN offers a healthcare plan for GA's but the benefits have eroded dramatically since 2003 when we were taken out of the state employee plan. Many GA's participate in UCONN's healthcare plan but almost all of us qualify for Medicaid/Husky. The average cost of healthcare for us and our families is \$1822 per year – 10% of our already meager salary and the coverage is not great.

Rather than studying how the state can limit our healthcare choices and prohibit us from opting out of what we already know is a bad healthcare plan, we would ask this committee to consider supporting a bill that will be raised in the Labor Committee to expand and enhance our healthcare. GA's like me are a vital part of ensuring that UCONN's entire student body receive a well-rounded and quality education.

I'd like to briefly share with you 3 healthcare stories that highlight the erosion in the healthcare that UCONN provides its students.

- Because the dental plan provided by UCONN had a twelve month waiting period for major dental work, two of my coworkers, Chris Field and Dooti Roy, ended up getting very sick and ultimately paying thousands out of their own pockets for needed dental work because they tried to hold out till the benefits kicked in.
- My coworker Marie Brault, a PhD student, had childhood cancer and complications from the chemotherapy that resulted in her having a full hip replacement in 2009. She has had minimal health concerns since then. Last week, she went to UConn's Health Center, the primary and most cost effective healthcare provider for GAs, for knee pain. She was told that her medical history was too complicated to receive even a basic x-ray from the Health Center and she would have to be referred to an orthopedist. She will have to pay out of pocket for basic imaging that UConn Health Services could have provided but declined to.
- Matt Ray, another PhD student, is a parent with an 11 year old son, a 5 year old daughter, and a wife who stays home to look after their children because child care costs are so high.

For Matt and his family, the current UConn health insurance premium for a graduate assistant and three dependents is prohibitively expensive so they are currently on Medicaid, as well as having to rely on student loans to pay for groceries and other necessities. For Matt and other graduate assistants, removing the ability to go on to Medicaid would make it impossible for them to continue their work at UConn.

And finally, I wanted to express my concern about a house proposal raised by Rep. John Scott (HB5354) that is very similar to this bill. Rep. Scott's proposal, while not a study bill, similarly calls for the prevention of students opting out of the university's healthcare plan for purposes of being on Medicaid. You may or may not know that Rep. John Scott is the President of the Bailey Agency which is the broker for all of UCONN student healthcare plans including the GA plan. His proposal is clearly a conflict of interest as he could stand to benefit if students were prohibited from opting out of UCONN's healthcare plan.

Thank you for your time and attention.